

## Performance and Ensembles

Music can't exist outside time. When we hear music, even if it is a recording playing, it is always something happening at a particular time and place. Music always sounds in context. When we perform music, we are enacting a musical event.

### Writing Concert Reviews

One of the best ways to develop your own listening skills and sense as a performer is to listen to others. Try writing a short concert review (c.350 words) and send it to us! Who knows? This could be the start of your own blog! If you prefer, narrate your review as a recording, but remember to script it properly using the same principles. We'll be asking you to write concert reviews in your course, so this is a great way to get a head start.

Remember to include key information about the performance. Tell us what it was like to be there, how music sounded, how successful and convincing the performance was, and why.

Here's a set of questions to consider to help you structure and write your review.

- Short contextual introduction
- Tell us about the event, venue, ensemble, perhaps a little about the anticipation or background
- Most of the review should be about the performance.
- If the programme is long/varied, pick out some key moments or numbers.
- Balance critical aspects and praise (and remember the inherently imperfect nature of live performance). Give a picture of the overall experience.
- If a performance is fantastic, you don't have to find faults for the sake of it, but illuminate why it was so convincing/compelling/engaging.
- Think about the balance of your review – will you focus on particular pieces or certain aspects of the performance?
- Who are you writing for? What do you expect them to already know, or not know?
- The reaction of the audience might be useful, but it's not a barometer for the performance.
- Provide a conclusion

Here's a neat example by [Fiona Maddocks](#).

### Music and Notation

Some notations are very specific (like the music of Brian Ferneyhough, who writes highly detailed scores). Other notation is far less specific. Sometimes that can be deliberate, where composers want to make performers make decisions about the music (as in the music of our own Nina Whiteman, who has devised notation in the form of mazes).

In much older music, knowledge of how to interpret the notation might be lost to time.

**Listen/Watch:** Brian Ferneyhough's percussion piece '[Bone Alphabet](#)', and [the composer teaching it](#). Is it easier to understand sonically than on the page?

The image shows a musical score for two guitars (Gtr. 1 and Gtr. 2) in 8/8 time. The score is highly detailed and complex, featuring numerous dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *violentissimo*. It includes intricate rhythmic patterns with various note values and rests, and is annotated with performance instructions like "legato poss quasi clarinetto" and "violentissimo". The score is divided into measures with bar lines and includes a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 44$ . The notation is dense and requires a high level of technical skill and interpretive ability.

An example of Brian Ferneyhough's highly specific scoring ('no time at all')